

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TANANA 01451 131503Z

53

ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-02 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 /069 W

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P 131343Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8428

DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TANANARIVE 1451

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: PINT, MA

SUBJECT: FIRE AT PRIME MINISTER'S PALACE, AND STUDENT STRIKES

SUMMARY. FIRE DEMOLISHED MOST OF PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE BUILDING. IT FOLLOWED TEN DAYS OF STUDENT STRIKES OVER GOVERNMENTAL EDICTS WHICH WERE SINCE MODIFIED BUT DID NOT ELIMINATE STRICKES. NERVOUS GOVERNMENT TOOK VARIOUS MEASURES TO HEAD OFF FURTHER ACTIVISM WHICH IT CLAIMS HAS BEEN GENERATED BY LEFT EXTREMIST GROUP MFM AND "IMPERIALISTS." PRO-GDRM RUMORS AND LEAFLETS HAVE BEGUN TO APPEAR, AT LEAST ONE DIRECTLY INDICTING THE US. END SUMMARY.

1. FIRE BROKE OUT AT ABOUT 2:30 A.M. SEPTEMBER 11 AT PRIME MINISTER'S PALACE IN TANANARIVE. INTERIOR AND GOOD PORTION OF EXTERIOR OF BUILDING WERE DEMOLISHED. AT 6:30 A.M. SAME MORENING, PRIME MINISTER ISSUED COMMUNIQUE THAT FIRE HAD BEEN CAUSED BY AN ACCIDENT BUT THAT AN INQUIRY WOULD BE UNDERTAKEN. PALACE (WHICH PM USES FOR OFFICE) IS SITUATED ON HILL WHICH DOMINATES CITY AND, ALONG WITH NEARBY QUEEN'S PALACE (NOW A MUSEUM), IS ONE OF FEW HISTORIC STRUCTURES IN THE COUNTRY, DATING FROM MID-1800S.

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PAGE 02 TANANA 01451 131503Z

2. FIRE OCCURRED AFTER TEN DAYS OF STRIKES BY STUDENTS AT TECHNICAL AND POLYTECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOLS IN TANANARIVE WHO OBJECTED TO RECENT EDICTS FROM MINISTER OF EDUCATION, SUCH AS LOWERING MAXIMUM AGE AT WHICH STUDENTS COULD ACQUIRE BACCALAUREAT. MINISTRY ACCEDED TO STUDENT DEMANDS AND MODIFIED ITS EDICTS, BUT STRIKES CONTINUED ANYWAY AND SPREAD TO PORTION OF UNIVERSITY.

3. GDRM BECAME NERVOUS OVER STRIKES, PROBABLY RECALLING HOW SEEMINGLY MODERATE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF STUDENTS IN 1972 LED RAPIDLY TO TSIRANANA'S OVERTHROW. FIRST, ON SEPTEMBER 7, POLICE ESTABLISHED ROADBLOCKS TO ENSURE THAT ONLY THOSE PERSONS WITH UNIVERSITY ID CARDS ENTERED CAMPUS. MINISTERS OF INTERIOR, JUSTICE, AND EDUCATION PERSONALLY PARTICIPATED AT ROADBLOCKS. SECOND, GDRM APPARENTLY GOT PROVINCE CHIEFS AND PREFETS THROUGHOUT COUNTRY TO ORGANIZE AVALANCHE OF ANTI-STRIKE MESSAGES, LINKING STRIKERS TO ANTI-REVOLUTIONARIES AND IMPERIALISTS. THIRD, ON SEPTEMBER 11 (AFTER PALACE FIRE) MINISTER OF INTERIOR ISSUED ORDER FOR ALL STUDENTS TO RETURN TO SCHOOL. FOURTH, GDRM ANNOUNCED TODAY (SEPTEMBER 13) THAT EXTREME LEFT ORGANIZATIONS MFM AND MFT WERE "DISSOLVED."

4. MFM IS OFFSHOOT OF PRO-CHINESE, TULEAR-BASED MONIMA PARTY AND IS HEADED BY RAKOTONIRINA MANANDAFY, A MERINA WHO WAS MONIMA'S LEADING THEORITICIAN. MFM BROKE WITH MONIMA JUST BEFORE RATSIRAKA ROSE TO POWER BECAUSE MONIMA HAD BEGUN TO SUPPORT RATSIRAKA. LAST WEEK, MEMBER OF CABINET TOLD CHARGE THAT GDRM HAD BECOME ALARMED OVER MANANDAFY' ACTIVITIES.

5. UNTIL STRIKES FIRST OCCURRED, POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND OVERALL ATMOSPHER IN TANANARIVE HAD BECOME UNEXPECTEDLY QUIET; TRACTS AND RUMORS HAD NOTICEABLY SUBSIDED. GDRM SHOWED CONCERN OVER STRIKES, BUT PUBLIC DID NOT PAY ATTENTION UNTIL ANTI-STRIKE MESSAGES BEGAN TO BE PUBLISHED AT END OF LAST WEEK. NATURALLY, WHEN FIRE OCCURRED, RUMOR AND LEAFLET MILLS RETURNED TO FULL OPERATION, THIS TIME REFLECTING PRO-GDRM VIEWPOINTS WHEREAS LEAFLETS AND RUMORS PRIOR TO JULY 30 DEATH OF FORMER PM WERE ALMOST CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TANANA 01451 131503Z

ALL ANTI-GDRM. ONE LEAFLET OF TOP QUALITY PRINTING) DIRECTLY ACCURSES US AND CIA, AS WELL AS IMPERIALISTS IN GENERAL, FOR STUDENT STRIKES. OTHERS SIMPLY LINK EXTREME LEFTIST MFM WITH IMPERIALISTS. GDRM HAS ALSO USED RADIO MADAGASCAR TO ACCUSE MFM AND IMPERIALISTS.

6. COMMENT: IT IS TOO EARLY TO ASSESS WHY GDRM MANIFESTED ITS NERVOUSNESS AT THIS TIME OR WHETHER RATSIRAKA

WILL USE THE STRIKES AND THE FIRE TO CLAMP DOWN ON "ANTI-  
REVOLUTIONARY ELEMENTS." RECENT MALAGASY HISTORY INDICATES  
THAT GOVERNMENT-FOMENTED ACCUSATIONS ARE SHORT-TERM  
PHENOMENA AND ARE NOT LIKELY TO PRESAGE MORE SIGNIFICANT  
DEVELOPMENTS. NONETHELESS, WE ARE ON OUR GUARD, SINCE  
WHOLE BUSINESS REMINDS US OF REICHSTAG FIRE.SHEINBAUM

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